(b) and (c) Apart from increasing the Judge strength from time to time, various steps have been taken by the Courts, viz. grouping off cases involving common questions of law, constitution of specialized benches and organizing Lok Adalats at regular intervals etc. The Government have also encouraged and set up alternative modes of disposal including mediation, negotiation and arbitration. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 has been amended by inserting Chapter VIA in the Act to provide for compulsory pre-litigative mechanism for conciliation and settlement of cases in certain public utility services. Special tribunals like Central Administrative Tribunal, State Administrative Tribunals, Income Tax Appellate Tribunals, Labour Courts, Consumer Courts etc. have been set up to expedite disposal of cases and to reduce the workload of regular Courts. Fast Track Courts for the disposal of long pending cases, particularly sessions cases and the cases involving under trials in jails have been set up. The Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 has further been amended to simplify the procedure and to reduce the delays in disposal of suits.

(d) Does not arise.

Opening of legal sector for Foreign Advocates

1962. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are facing problems in opening legal sector to Foreign Advocates as committed by Government and GATT;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) steps proposed to be taken to meet the stiff opposition from the Indian Lawyers in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI ARUN JAITLEY): (a) to (c) As it is one of the statutory functions of the Bar Council of India to safeguard the rights, privileges and interests of advocates (vide section 7(1) (d) of the Advocates Act, 1961), it was requested for its views on the subject. The Council is totally opposed to the entry of foreign lawyers in India. The Council also adopted a Resolution in its meetings held on 24th and 25th October, 2002, which reads as under:

"The Council considered the letter of Shri R.L. Meena, Law Secretary, addressed to the Chairman, Bar Council of India requesting the Bar Council of India to send comments in the matter to enable the Department of Legal Affairs to offer its comments to the Department of Commerce. After consideration, the Bar Council of India has reiterated its earlier view on the issue of not permitting foreign lawyers and law firms in the country. The Bar Council of India once again strongly opposes the entry of foreign lawyers and its strong views are to be made known to the Ministry of Law and Justice and Company affairs. In this view, the Council has no other views to offer on the subject."

The Government has so far not taken any dissimilar view.

Plan to Introduce Tonnage Tax

1963. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any plans to introduce tonnage tax; and

(b) if so, by when and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING (SHRI DILIP KUMAR MANSUKHLAL GANDHI): (a) and (b) While Government is committed to the establishment of a facilitative fiscal environment (including the introduction of tonnage tax) in which the shipping industry can thrive, no definite time-frame can be indicated since the entire process has to pass through different stages of consideration and examination including formal legislation.

Project to link the Barak Valley and adjoining Hill Districts

1964. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has decided to link the Barak Valley and the adjoining Hill districts to the National Water-way;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the techno-economic feasibility study of the project has been completed;